

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

The claims have been divided into Groups as follows:

Group I: Claims 1, 2, 9 and 11, drawn to a hot-rolled steel sheet.
Group II: Claims 6 and 12, drawn to a cold-rolled steel sheet.
Group III: Claims 3-5, 7, 8 and 13, drawn to processes for making a hot-rolled steel sheet and a cold-rolled steel sheet.

Applicants elect, with traverse, Group III, Claims 3-5, 7, 8 and 13 (drawn to processes for making a hot-rolled steel sheet and a cold-rolled steel sheet), for examination.

Restriction is only proper if the claims of the restricted groups are independent or patentably distinct and there would be a serious burden placed on the Examiner if restriction is not required (MPEP §803). The burden is on the Examiner to provide reasons and/or examples to support any conclusion in regard to patentable distinction (MPEP §803). Moreover, when citing lack of unity of invention in a national stage application, the Examiner has the burden of explaining why each group lacks unity with each other group specifically describing special technical features in each group (MPEP § 1893.03(d)).

The Office has asserted that Groups I - III do not relate to a single general inventive concept under PCT Rule 13.1 because under PCT Rule 13.2, they lack the same or corresponding special technical features for the following reasons: “A review of U.S. Patent 6,358,338 issued to Guelton et al. demonstrates that the special technical feature, the steel sheet (...), does not define a contribution which each of the inventions, considered as a whole, makes over the prior art”.

Applicants respectfully submit that the Examiner has not provided any indication that the *entire* contents of the claims (e.g., including strength and recrystallization fraction characteristics) *interpreted in light of the description* was considered in making the assertion of a lack of unity and therefore has not met the burden necessary to support the assertion.

Furthermore, 37 C.F.R. § 1.475(b) states in pertinent part:

“An international or a national stage application containing claims to different categories of invention will be considered to have unity of invention

if the claims are drawn only to one of the following combinations of categories:

(1) A product and a process specially adapted for the manufacture of the said product; . . .”

In addition, The MPEP §806.03 states:

“Where the claims of an application define the same essential characteristics of a *single* disclosed embodiment of an invention, restriction therebetween should never be required. This is because the claims are not directed to distinct inventions; rather they are different definitions of the same disclosed subject matter, varying in breadth or scope of definition.”

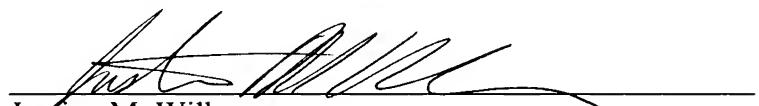
Applicants respectfully submit that the Office has not considered the relationship of the inventions of Groups I-III with respect to 37 C.F.R. § 1.475(b)(1) and MPEP §806.03. Therefore the burden necessary according to MPEP § 1893.03(d) to sustain the conclusion that the groups lack of unity of invention has not been met.

Accordingly, and for the reasons presented above, Applicants submit that the Office has failed to meet the burden necessary in order to sustain the requirement for restriction. Applicants therefore request that the requirement for restriction be withdrawn.

Applicants respectfully submit that the above-identified application is now in condition for examination on the merits, and early notice thereof is earnestly solicited.

Respectfully Submitted,

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